

# Ezra

## The Decree of Cyrus

1:1<sup>1</sup> In the first<sup>2</sup> year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order to fulfill the LORD's message<sup>3</sup> spoken through<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah,<sup>5</sup> the LORD stirred the mind<sup>6</sup> of King Cyrus of Persia. He disseminated<sup>7</sup> a proclamation<sup>8</sup> throughout his entire kingdom, announcing in a written edict<sup>9</sup> the following:<sup>10</sup>

1:2 "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia:

"The LORD God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has instructed

me to build a temple<sup>11</sup> for him in Jerusalem,<sup>12</sup> which is in Judah. 1:3 Anyone from<sup>13</sup> his people among you (may his God be with him!) may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and may build the temple of the LORD God of Israel – he is the God who is in Jerusalem. 1:4 Anyone who survives in any of those places where he is a resident foreigner must be helped by his neighbors<sup>14</sup> with silver, gold, equipment, and animals, along with voluntary offerings for the temple of God which is in Jerusalem."<sup>15</sup>

## The Exiles Prepare to Return to Jerusalem

1:5 Then the leaders<sup>15</sup> of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and the Levites – all those whose mind God had stirred – got ready<sup>16</sup> to go up in order to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> 1:6 All their neighbors assisted<sup>18</sup> them with silver utensils,<sup>19</sup> gold, equipment, animals, and expensive gifts, not to mention<sup>20</sup> all the voluntary offerings.

1:7 Then King Cyrus brought out the vessels of the LORD's temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought from Jerusalem and had displayed<sup>21</sup> in the temple of his gods. 1:8 King Cyrus of Persia entrusted<sup>22</sup> them to<sup>23</sup> Mithredath<sup>24</sup> the treasurer, who counted them

<sup>1</sup> **sn** In addition to the canonical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, there are two deuterocanonical books that are also called "Ezra." Exactly how these books are designated varies in ancient literature. In the Septuagint (LXX) canonical Ezra is called Second Esdras, but in the Latin Vulgate it is called First Esdras. Our Nehemiah is called Third Esdras in some manuscripts of the LXX, but it is known as Second Esdras in the Latin Vulgate. (In the earliest LXX manuscripts Ezra and Nehemiah were regarded as one book, as they were in some Hebrew manuscripts.) The deuterocanonical books of Ezra are called First and Fourth Esdras in the LXX, but Third and Fourth Esdras in the Latin Vulgate. The titles for the so-called books of Ezra are thus rather confusing, a fact that one must keep in mind when consulting this material.

<sup>2</sup> **sn** The first year of Cyrus would be ca. 539 b.c. Cyrus reigned in Persia from ca. 539-530 b.c.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the word of the LORD."

<sup>4</sup> **tc** The MT reads מפי (*mippi*, "from the mouth of"), but this should probably be emended to בפי (*b'fi*, "by the mouth of"), which is the way the parallel passage in 2 Chr 36:22 reads. This is also reflected in the LXX, which is either reflecting an alternate textual tradition of בפי or is attempting to harmonize Ezra 1:1 in light of 2 Chronicles.

**tn** *Heb* "from the mouth of."

<sup>5</sup> **sn** Cf. Jer 29:10; 25:11-14. Jeremiah had prophesied that after a time of seventy years the Jews would return "to this place." How these seventy years are to be reckoned is a matter of debate among scholars. Some understand the period to refer to the approximate length of Babylon's ascendancy as a world power, beginning either with the fall of Nineveh (612 b.c.) or with Nebuchadnezzar's coronation (605 b.c.) and continuing till the fall of Babylon to the Persians in 539 b.c. Others take the seventy years to refer to the period from the destruction of the temple in 586 b.c. till its rebuilding in 516 b.c.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* "spirit." The Hebrew noun רוּחַ (*ruakh*, "spirit") has a broad range of meanings (see BDB 924-26 s.v.). Here, it probably refers to (1) "mind" as the seat of mental acts (e.g., Exod 28:3; Deut 34:9; Isa 29:24; 40:13; Ezek 11:5; 20:32; 1 Chr 28:12; cf. BDB 925 s.v. 6) or (2) "will" as the seat of volitional decisions (e.g., Exod 35:5, 22; Pss 51:12, 14; 57:8; 2 Chr 29:31; cf. BDB 925 s.v. 7). So also in v. 5.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* "caused to pass."

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "a voice." The Hebrew noun קוֹל (*qol*, "voice, sound") has a broad range of meanings, including the metonymical (cause – effect) nuance "proclamation" (e.g., Exod 36:6; 2 Chr 24:9; 30:5; 36:22; Ezra 1:1; 10:7; Neh 8:15). See BDB 877 s.v. 3.a.2.

<sup>9</sup> **sn** For an interesting extrabiblical parallel to this edict see the Cyrus cylinder (ANET 315-16).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* "in writing, saying."

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Heb* "house." The Hebrew noun בַּיִת (*bayit*, "house") is often used in reference to the temple of Yahweh (BDB 108 s.v. 1.a). This is also frequent elsewhere in Ezra and Nehemiah (e.g., Ezra 1:3, 4, 5, 7; 2:68; 3:8, 9, 11, 12; 4:3; 6:22; 7:27; 8:17, 25, 29, 30, 33, 36; 9:9; 10:1, 6, 9).

<sup>12</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* "from all."

<sup>14</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the men of his place."

<sup>15</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the heads of the fathers."

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* "arose."

<sup>17</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** *Heb* "strengthened their hands."

<sup>19</sup> **tc** The MT reads בכלֵּי־כֶסֶף (*bikhley kheseif*, "with silver vessels"). However, part of the LXX manuscript tradition reads ἐν παντι ἀργυριῶ (*en pasin argurio*), which reflects an alternate Hebrew reading of בכלֵּי־כֶסֶף (*bakkol-bakkesef*, "everywhere, with silver"). The textual variant involves (1) simple omission of *yod* (י) between two words, a common scribal mistake; (2) haplography of the preposition *bet* (ב); and (3) an alternate vocalization tradition of the first term.

<sup>20</sup> **tn** *Heb* "besides" or "in addition to."

<sup>21</sup> **tn** *Heb* "and he gave them."

<sup>22</sup> **tn** *Heb* "brought them forth."

<sup>23</sup> **tn** *Heb* "upon the hand of."

<sup>24</sup> **sn** A Persian name meaning "gift of Mithras." See HALOT 656 s.v. מִיְתְרָדָת.

out to Sheshbazzar<sup>1</sup> the leader of the Judahite exiles.<sup>2</sup>

1:9 The inventory<sup>3</sup> of these items was as follows:

- 30 gold basins,<sup>4</sup>
- 1,000 silver basins,
- 29 silver utensils,<sup>5</sup>
- 1:10 30 gold bowls,
- 410 other<sup>6</sup> silver bowls,

<sup>1</sup> **sn** A Babylonian name with the probable meaning "Shamash protect the father." See HALOT 1664-65 s.v. שֶׁשְׁבַצָּר.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb "Sheshbazzar the prince to Judah"; TEV, CEV "the governor of Judah."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb "these are their number."

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The exact meaning of the Hebrew noun אֲגָרְתַּל (agartal, which occurs twice in this verse) is somewhat uncertain. The lexicons suggest that it is related to a common Semitic root (the Hebrew derivative has a prosthetic prefixed א [aleph] and interchange between י [yod] and ק [kof]): Judean Aramaic and Syriac *qartalla*, Arabic *qirtallat*, Ethiopic *qartalo*, all meaning "basket" (BDB 173-74 s.v.; HALOT 11 s.v.). There is debate whether this is a loanword from Greek *καρταλλος* (*kartallos*, "basket"), Persian *hirtal* ("leather bag") or Hittite *kurtal* ("container"). The term is traditionally understood as a kind of vessel, such as "basket, basin" (BDB 173-74 s.v.; HALOT 11 s.v.); but some suggest "leather bag" or a basket-shaped container of some sort (P. Humbert, "En marge du dictionnaire hébraïque," ZAW 62 [1950]: 199-207; DCH 1:118 s.v.). The LXX translated it as ψυκτήρ (*psukter*, "metal bowl"). The precise meaning depends on whether the nouns כֶּסֶף (*kesef*, "silver") and זָהָב (*zahav*, "gold"), which follow each use of this plural construct noun, are genitives of content ("containers full of silver" and "containers full of gold") or genitives of material ("silver containers" and "gold containers" = containers made from silver and gold). If they are genitives of content, the term probably means "baskets" or "leather bags" (filled with silver and gold); however, if they are genitives of material, the term would mean "basins" (made of silver and gold). Elsewhere in Ezra 1, the nouns כֶּסֶף ("silver") and זָהָב ("gold") are used as genitives of material, not genitives of contents; therefore, the translation "gold basins" and "silver basins" is preferred.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** Heb "knives." The Hebrew noun מַחְלָפִיִּם (*makhlafim*, "knives") is found only here in the OT. While the basic meaning of the term is fairly clear, what it refers to here is unclear. The verb חָלַף (*khalaf*) means "to pass through" (BDB 322 s.v. חָלַף) or "to cut through" (HALOT 321 s.v. חָלַף); see also Judg 5:26; Job 20:24; thus, the lexicons suggest מַחְלָפִיִּם means "knives" (BDB 322 s.v. מַחְלָפִיִּם; HALOT 569 s.v. מַחְלָפִיִּם). The related noun חָלָפִית (*khalafot*, "knife") is used in Mishnaic Hebrew (HALOT 321 s.v. חָלָפִית), and חָלָפִיִּת (*khalifot*, "knives") appears in the Talmud. The noun appears in the cognate languages: Ugaritic *khlpm* ("knives"; UT 19) and Syriac *khalofita* ("shearing knife"; HALOT 321 s.v. חָלָפִיִּת). The Vulgate translated it as "knives," while the LXX understood it as referring to replacement pieces for the offering basins. The English translations render it variously; some following the Vulgate and others adopting the approach of the LXX: "knives" (KJV, NKJV, NRSV), "censers" (RSV), "duplicates" (NASV), "silver pans" (NIV), "bowls" (TEV), "other dishes" (CEV). Verse 11 lists these twenty-nine objects among the "gold and silver vessels" brought back to Jerusalem for temple worship. The translation above offers the intentionally ambiguous "silver utensils" (the term מַחְלָפִיִּם ["knives"] would hardly refer to "gold" items, but could refer to "silver items").

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The meaning of the Hebrew term מִשְׁנֵיִם (*mishnim*) is uncertain. The noun מִשְׁנֵה (*mishneh*) means "double, second" (BDB 1041 s.v.), "what is doubled, two-fold" (HALOT 650 s.v. מִשְׁנֵה 3). The translations reflect a diversity of approaches: "410 silver bowls of a second kind" (KJV, NASV, RSV margin), "410 other silver bowls" (NRSV) and "410 matching silver bowls" (NIV). BDB 1041 s.v. מִשְׁנֵה 3.a suggests it was originally a numeral that was garbled in the transmission process, as reflected in the LXX: "two thousand" (so RSV: "two

and 1,000 other vessels.

1:11 All these gold and silver vessels totaled 5,400.<sup>7</sup> Sheshbazzar brought them all along when the captives were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

### The Names of the Returning Exiles

2:1<sup>8</sup> These are the people<sup>9</sup> of the province who were going up,<sup>10</sup> from the captives of the exile whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had forced into exile in Babylon. They returned to Jerusalem<sup>11</sup> and Judah, each to his own city. 2:2 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The number of Israelites<sup>12</sup> was as follows:<sup>13</sup>

- 2:3 the descendants<sup>14</sup> of Parosh: 2,172;
- 2:4 the descendants of Shephatiah: 372;
- 2:5 the descendants of Arah: 775;
- 2:6 the descendants of Pahath-Moab (from the line<sup>15</sup> of Jeshua and<sup>16</sup> Joab): 2,812;
- 2:7 the descendants of Elam: 1,254;
- 2:8 the descendants of Zattu: 945;
- 2:9 the descendants of Zaccai: 760;

*thousand* four hundred and ten bowls of silver"). The BHS editor suggests revocalizing the term מִשְׁנֵיִם (*mishnim*, "changed").

<sup>7</sup> **sn** The total number as given in the MT does not match the numbers given for the various items in v. 9. It is not clear whether the difference is due to error in textual transmission or whether the constituent items mentioned are only a selection from a longer list, in which case the total from that longer list may have been retained. The numbers provided in 1 Esdras come much closer to agreeing with the number in Ezra 1:9-11, but this does not necessarily mean that 1 Esdras has been better preserved here than Ezra. 1 Esdras 2:13-15 (RSV) says, "The number of these was: a thousand gold cups, a thousand silver cups, twenty-nine silver censures, thirty gold bowls, two thousand four hundred and ten silver bowls, and a thousand other vessels. All the vessels were handed over, gold and silver, five thousand four hundred and sixty-nine, and they were carried back by Sheshbazzar with the returning exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem."

<sup>8</sup> **sn** The list of names and numbers in this chapter of Ezra has a parallel account in Neh 7:6-73. The fact that the two lists do not always agree in specific details suggests that various textual errors have crept into the accounts during the transmission process.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb "the sons of."

<sup>10</sup> **tn** The Hebrew term הָעֹלִיִּם (*ha'olim*, "those who were going up" [Qal active participle]) refers to continual action in the past. Most translations render this as a simple past: "went up" (KJV), "came up" (RSV, ASV, NASV, NIV), "came" (NRSV). CEV paraphrases: "were on their way back."

<sup>11</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Heb "men of the people of Israel."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** The words "was as follows" are not in the Hebrew text but are used in the translation for clarity.

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb "the sons of."

<sup>15</sup> **tn** Heb "to the sons of." Cf. v. 40.

<sup>16</sup> **tc** The MT reads יוֹאָב (yo'av, "Joab"). However, syntax demands the reading יוֹאָבִי (yo'av, "and Joab") which is reflected in the LXX and Syriac.

**2:10** the descendants of Bani: 642;  
**2:11** the descendants of Bebai: 623;  
**2:12** the descendants of Azgad: 1,222;  
**2:13** the descendants of Adonikam: 666;  
**2:14** the descendants of Bigvai: 2,056;  
**2:15** the descendants of Adin: 454;  
**2:16** the descendants of Ater (through<sup>4</sup> Hezekiah): 98;  
**2:17** the descendants of Bezai: 323;  
**2:18** the descendants of Jorah: 112;  
**2:19** the descendants of Hashum: 223;  
**2:20** the descendants of Gibbar: 95.  
**2:21** The men<sup>2</sup> of Bethlehem:<sup>3</sup> 123;  
**2:22** the men of Netophah: 56;  
**2:23** the men of Anathoth: 128;  
**2:24** the men of the family<sup>4</sup> of Azmaveth: 42;  
**2:25** the men of Kiriath Jearim,<sup>5</sup> Kephirah and Beeroth: 743;  
**2:26** the men of Ramah and Geba: 621;  
**2:27** the men of Micmash: 122;  
**2:28** the men of Bethel<sup>6</sup> and Ai: 223;  
**2:29** the descendants of Nebo: 52;  
**2:30** the descendants of Magbish: 156;  
**2:31** the descendants of the other Elam: 1,254;  
**2:32** the descendants of Harim: 320;  
**2:33** the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono: 725;  
**2:34** the men of Jericho:<sup>7</sup> 345;  
**2:35** the descendants of Senaah: 3,630.  
**2:36** The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family<sup>8</sup> of Jeshua): 973;  
**2:37** the descendants of Immer: 1,052;  
**2:38** the descendants of Pashhur: 1,247;  
**2:39** the descendants of Harim: 1,017.  
**2:40** The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel (through the line of Hodaviah): 74.  
**2:41** The singers: the descendants of Asaph: 128.  
**2:42** The gatekeepers:<sup>9</sup> the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater, the descen-

dants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub, the descendants of Hatita, and the descendants of Shobai: 139.

**2:43** The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha, the descendants of Tabbaoth, **2:44** the descendants of Keros, the descendants of Siaha, the descendants of Padon, **2:45** the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah, the descendants of Akkub, **2:46** the descendants of Hagab, the descendants of Shalmai,<sup>10</sup> the descendants of Hanan, **2:47** the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar, the descendants of Reaiah, **2:48** the descendants of Rezin, the descendants of Nekoda, the descendants of Gazzam, **2:49** the descendants of Uzzah, the descendants of Paseah, the descendants of Besai, **2:50** the descendants of Asnah, the descendants of Meunim, the descendants of Nephussim, **2:51** the descendants of Bakbuk, the descendants of Hakupha, the descendants of Harhur, **2:52** the descendants of Bazluth, the descendants of Mehida, the descendants of Harsha, **2:53** the descendants of Barkos, the descendants of Sisera, the descendants of Temah, **2:54** the descendants of Neziah, and the descendants of Hatipha.

**2:55** The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, the descendants of Hassophereth, the descendants of Peruda, **2:56** the descendants of Jaala, the descendants of Darkon, the descendants of Giddel, **2:57** the descendants of Shephatiah, the descendants of Hattil, the descendants of Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and the descendants of Ami.

**2:58** All the temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon: 392.

**2:59** These are the ones that came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer (although they were unable to certify<sup>11</sup> their family connection<sup>12</sup> or their ancestry,<sup>13</sup> as to whether they really were from Israel):

**2:60** the descendants of Delaiah, the descendants of Tobiah, and the descendants of Nekoda: 652.

**2:61** And from among<sup>14</sup> the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, the descendants of Hakkoz, and the descendants of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that<sup>15</sup> name). **2:62** They<sup>16</sup> searched for their records in the genea-

<sup>1</sup> tn Heb "to." So also in vv. 36, 40.

<sup>2</sup> tc The translation follows the suggestion in BHS and reads אנשי (anshe, "the men of") here rather than the reading בני (bene, "the sons of") found in the MT. So also in vv. 25, 26, 33, 34.

<sup>3</sup> map For location see Map5-B1; Map7-E2; Map8-E2; Map10-B4.

<sup>4</sup> tc The translation follows the suggestion in BHS and reads בית (ashme bet, "men of the house of") here rather than the reading בני (bene, "the sons of") found in the MT.

tn Heb "the men of the house of Azmaveth"; some regard בית (bet, "house of") as a part of the place name: NAB, NLT "Beth-azmaveth."

<sup>5</sup> tc The translation, with the support of many manuscripts, reads ארמ (arim) here rather than the reading ארמ (arim) of the MT.

<sup>6</sup> map For location see Map4-G4; Map5-C1; Map6-E3; Map7-D1; Map8-G3.

<sup>7</sup> map For location see Map5-B2; Map6-E1; Map7-E1; Map8-E3; Map10-A2; Map11-A1.

<sup>8</sup> tn Heb "the house of."

<sup>9</sup> tc Here it is preferable to delete the reading בני (bene, "the sons of") found in the MT.

<sup>10</sup> tc The translation follows the Qere reading "Shalmai" (so KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT) rather than the MT *Kethib* "Shamlai" (so ASV, NAB, NRSV).

<sup>11</sup> tn Heb "relate."

<sup>12</sup> tn Heb "the house of their fathers."

<sup>13</sup> tn Heb "their seed."

<sup>14</sup> tc The translation reads וּמִן (umin, "and from") rather than the reading וּמִבְנֵי (umibbene, "and from the sons of") found in the MT.

<sup>15</sup> tn Heb "their."

<sup>16</sup> tn Heb "these."

logical materials, but did not find them.<sup>1</sup> They were therefore excluded<sup>2</sup> from the priesthood. **2:63** The governor<sup>3</sup> instructed them not to eat any of the sacred food until there was a priest who could consult<sup>4</sup> the Urim and Thummim.

**2:64** The entire group numbered 42,360,<sup>5</sup> **2:65** not counting<sup>6</sup> their male and female servants, who numbered 7,337. They also had 200 male and female singers **2:66** and 736 horses, 245 mules, **2:67** 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys. **2:68** When they came to the LORD's temple in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders<sup>7</sup> offered voluntary offerings for the temple of God in order to rebuild<sup>8</sup> it on its site. **2:69** As they were able,<sup>9</sup> they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas<sup>10</sup> of gold, 5,000 minas<sup>11</sup> of silver, and 100 priestly robes.<sup>12</sup>

**2:70** The priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel lived in their towns.

### *The Altar is Rebuilt*

**3:1** When the seventh month arrived and the Israelites<sup>13</sup> were living<sup>14</sup> in their<sup>15</sup> towns, the people assembled<sup>16</sup> in<sup>17</sup> Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** *Heb* "their records were searched for in the genealogical materials, but were not found." This passive construction has been translated as active for stylistic reasons.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* "they were desecrated."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The Hebrew word תרשטתא (*tirshata*) is an official title of the Persian governor in Judea, perhaps similar in meaning to "excellency" (BDB 1077 s.v.; HALOT 1798 s.v.; W. L. Holladay, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 395).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** *Heb* "to stand."

<sup>5</sup> **sn** The same total is given in Neh 7:66, but it is difficult to understand how this number is reached, since the numbers of people listed in the constituent groups do not add up to 42,360. The list in vv. 3-60 apparently is not intended to be exhaustive, but the basis of the selectivity is unclear.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* "besides" or "in addition to."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the heads of the fathers."

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "cause it to stand."

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* "according to their strength."

<sup>10</sup> **tn** The meaning of the Hebrew word דרבמנים (*dark'monim*, cf. Neh 7:69, 70, 71) is uncertain. It may be a Greek loanword meaning "drachmas" (the view adopted here and followed also by NAB, NASB, NIV) or a Persian loanword "daric," referring to a Persian gold coin (BDB 204 s.v. דרבמון; HALOT 232 s.v. דרבמון; cf. ASV, NRSV). For further study, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 206-9.

<sup>11</sup> **sn** The word מנין (*manim*, cf. Neh 7:71, 72) is a measuring weight for valuable metals, equal to 160/ of a talent or 60 shekels (BDB 584 s.v. מנין; HALOT 599 s.v. מנין). For further study, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 203-6.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Or "garments."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the sons of Israel."

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The word "living" is not in the Hebrew text, but is implied. Some translations supply "settled" (cf. NAB, NIV, NLT).

<sup>15</sup> **tc** The translation reads with some medieval Hebrew MSS and ancient versions בעריהם (*be'arehem*, "in their towns"), rather than the reading בערים (*be'arim*, "in the towns") found in the MT. Cf. Neh 7:72 HT [7:73 ET].

<sup>16</sup> **tn** The Hebrew text adds the phrase "like one man." This has not been included in the translation for stylistic reasons.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** *Heb* "to."

<sup>18</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

**3:2** Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak<sup>19</sup> and his priestly colleagues<sup>20</sup> and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his colleagues<sup>21</sup> started to build<sup>22</sup> the altar of the God of Israel so they could offer burnt offerings on it as required by<sup>23</sup> the law of Moses the man of God. **3:3** They established the altar on its foundations, even though they were in terror of the local peoples,<sup>24</sup> and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and the evening offerings. **3:4** They observed the Festival of Temporary Shelters<sup>25</sup> as required<sup>26</sup> and offered the proper number of<sup>27</sup> daily burnt offerings according to the requirement for each day. **3:5** Afterward they offered the continual burnt offerings and those for the new moons and those for all the holy assemblies of the LORD and all those that were being voluntarily offered to the LORD. **3:6** From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. However, the LORD's temple was not at that time established.<sup>28</sup>

### *Preparations for Rebuilding the Temple*

**3:7** So they provided money<sup>29</sup> for the masons and carpenters, and food, beverages, and olive oil for the people of Sidon<sup>30</sup> and Tyre,<sup>31</sup> so that they would bring cedar timber from Lebanon to the seaport<sup>32</sup> at Joppa, in accord with the edict of King Cyrus of Persia. **3:8** In the second year after they had come to the temple of God in Jerusalem,<sup>33</sup> in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the

<sup>19</sup> **sn** *Jozadak* (also in 3:8) is a variant spelling of Jehozadak.

<sup>20</sup> **tn** *Heb* "his brothers the priests."

<sup>21</sup> **tn** *Heb* "his brothers."

<sup>22</sup> **tn** *Heb* "arose and built."

<sup>23</sup> **tn** *Heb* "written in." Cf. v. 4.

<sup>24</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the peoples of the lands."

<sup>25</sup> **tn** The Hebrew phrase אֵת הַיְהוּדָה (*et khag-hassukot*, "festival of huts" [or "shelters"]) is traditionally known as the Feast of Tabernacles. The rendering "booths" (cf. NAB, NASB, NRSV) is probably better than the traditional "tabernacles" in light of the meaning of the term סֹכֶה (*sukkah*, "hut; booth"), but "booths" are frequently associated with trade shows and craft fairs in contemporary American English. The nature of the celebration during this feast as a commemoration of the wanderings of the Israelites after they left Egypt suggests that a translation like "temporary shelters" is more appropriate.

<sup>26</sup> **tn** *Heb* "according to what is written."

<sup>27</sup> **tn** *Heb* "by number."

<sup>28</sup> **tn** Or "the foundation of the LORD's temple was not yet laid."

<sup>29</sup> **tn** *Heb* "silver."

<sup>30</sup> **map** For location see Map1-A1; JP3-F3; JP4-F3.

<sup>31</sup> **map** For location see Map1-A2; Map2-G2; Map4-A1; JP3-F3; JP4-F3.

<sup>32</sup> **tn** *Heb* "to the sea"

<sup>33</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

son of Jozadak initiated the work,<sup>1</sup> along with the rest of their associates,<sup>2</sup> the priests and the Levites, and all those who were coming to Jerusalem from the exile. They appointed<sup>3</sup> the Levites who were at least twenty years old<sup>4</sup> to take charge of the work on the LORD's temple. **3:9** So Jeshua appointed both his sons and his relatives,<sup>5</sup> Kadmiel and his sons (the sons of Yehudah<sup>6</sup>), to take charge of the workers in the temple of God, along with the sons of Henadad, their sons, and their relatives<sup>7</sup> the Levites. **3:10** When the builders established the LORD's temple, the priests, ceremonially attired and with their clarions,<sup>8</sup> and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with their cymbals, stood to praise the LORD according to the instructions left by<sup>9</sup> King David of Israel.<sup>10</sup> **3:11** With antiphonal response they sang,<sup>11</sup> praising and glorifying the LORD:

“For he is good;  
his loyal love toward Israel is forever.”

All the people gave a loud<sup>12</sup> shout as they praised the LORD when the temple of the LORD was established. **3:12** Many of the priests, the Levites, and the leaders<sup>13</sup> – older people who had seen with their own eyes the former temple while it was still established<sup>14</sup> – were weeping loudly,<sup>15</sup> and many others raised their voice in a joyous shout. **3:13** People were unable to tell the difference between the sound of joyous shouting and the sound of the people's weeping, for the people were shouting so loudly<sup>16</sup> that the sound was heard a long way off.

### *Opposition to the Building Efforts*

**4:1** When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin learned that the former exiles<sup>17</sup> were building a temple for the LORD God of Israel, **4:2** they came to Zerubbabel and the leaders<sup>18</sup> and said to them, “Let us help you build,<sup>19</sup> for like you we seek your God and we have been sacrificing to him<sup>20</sup> from the time<sup>21</sup> of King Esarhaddon<sup>22</sup> of Assyria, who brought us here.”<sup>23</sup> **4:3** But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the leaders of Israel said to them, “You have no right<sup>24</sup> to help us build the temple of our God. We will build it by ourselves for the LORD God of Israel, just as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us.” **4:4** Then the local people<sup>25</sup> began to discourage<sup>26</sup> the people of Judah and to dishearten them from building. **4:5** They were hiring advisers to oppose them, so as to frustrate their plans, throughout the time<sup>27</sup> of King Cyrus of Persia until the reign of King Darius<sup>28</sup> of Persia.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb “began”; the phrase “the work” is supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb “their brothers.”

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb “stood.”

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Heb “from twenty years and upward.”

<sup>5</sup> **tn** Heb “brothers.”

<sup>6</sup> **sn** The name יְהוּדָה (*Yehudah*; cf. KJV, ASV, NASB “Judah”) is probably a variant of Hodaviah (see Ezra 2:40; cf. NIV, NCV, TEV, CEV, NLT).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Heb “brothers.”

<sup>8</sup> **sn** This was a long, straight, metallic instrument used for signal calls, rather than the traditional ram's horn (both instruments are typically translated “trumpet” by English versions).

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb “according to the hands of.”

<sup>10</sup> **sn** See Ps 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1. Cf. 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3; 20:21.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Heb “they answered.”

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Heb “great.”

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Heb “the heads of the fathers.”

<sup>14</sup> **sn** The temple had been destroyed some fifty years earlier by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

<sup>15</sup> **tn** Heb “with a great voice.”

<sup>16</sup> **tn** Heb “a great shout.”

<sup>17</sup> **tn** Heb “the sons of the exile.”

<sup>18</sup> **tn** Heb “the heads of the fathers.” So also in v. 3.

<sup>19</sup> **tn** Heb “Let us build with you.”

<sup>20</sup> **tc** The translation reads with the Qere, a Qumran ms, the LXX, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Arabic version يَلِي (*ʾelo*, “and him”) rather than the *Kethib* of the MT, וְלֹא (*ʾelo*, “and not”).

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Heb “days.”

<sup>22</sup> **sn** Esarhaddon was king of Assyria ca. 681-669 B.C.

<sup>23</sup> **sn** The Assyrian policy had been to resettle Samaria with peoples from other areas (cf. 2 Kgs 17:24-34). These immigrants acknowledged Yahweh as well as other deities in some cases. The Jews who returned from the Exile regarded them with suspicion and were not hospitable to their offer of help in rebuilding the temple.

<sup>24</sup> **tn** Heb “not to you and to us.”

<sup>25</sup> **tn** Heb “the people of the land.” Elsewhere this expression sometimes has a negative connotation, referring to a lay population that was less zealous for Judaism than it should have been. Here, however, it seems to refer to the resident population of the area without any negative connotation.

<sup>26</sup> **tn** Heb “were making slack the hands of.”

<sup>27</sup> **tn** Heb “all the days of.”

<sup>28</sup> **sn** Darius ruled Persia ca. 522-486 B.C.

<sup>29</sup> **sn** The purpose of the opening verses of this chapter is to summarize why the Jews returning from the exile were unable to complete the rebuilding of the temple more quickly than they did. The delay was due not to disinterest on their part but to the repeated obstacles that had been placed in their path by determined foes.

*Official Complaints Are Lodged Against the Jews*

4:6<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus<sup>2</sup> they filed an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> 4:7 And during the reign<sup>4</sup> of Artaxerxes, Bishlam,<sup>5</sup> Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their colleagues<sup>6</sup> wrote to King Artaxerxes<sup>7</sup> of Persia. This letter<sup>8</sup> was first written in Aramaic but then translated.

[Aramaic:]<sup>9</sup>

**1 sn** The chronological problems of Ezra 4:6-24 are well known and have been the subject of extensive discussion since ancient times. Both v. 5 and v. 24 describe the reign of Darius I Hystaspes, who ruled Persia ca. 522-486 b.c. and in whose time the rebuilt temple was finished. The material in between is from later times (v. 16 describes the rebuilding of the walls, not the temple), and so appear to be a digression. Even recognizing this, there are still questions, such as why Cambyses (530-522 b.c.) is not mentioned at all, and why events from the time of Xerxes (486-465 b.c.) and Artaxerxes (464-423 b.c.) are included here if the author was discussing opposition to the building of the temple, which was finished in 516 b.c. Theories to explain these difficulties are too numerous to mention here, but have existed since ancient times: Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, rearranged the account to put Cambyses before Xerxes and replacing Artaxerxes with Xerxes (for further discussion of Josephus' rearrangement see L. L. Grabbe, "Josephus and the Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration" *JBL* 106 [1987]: 231-46). In brief, it seems best to view the author's primary concern here as thematic (the theme of opposition to the Jewish resettlement in Jerusalem, including the rebuilding of the temple and restoration of Jerusalem's walls) rather than purely chronological. In the previous verses the author had shown how the Jews had rejected an offer of assistance from surrounding peoples and how these people in turn harassed them. The inserted account shows how, in light of the unremitting opposition the Jews experienced (even extending down to more recent times), this refusal of help had been fully justified. Some of the documents the author employed show how this opposition continued even after the temple was rebuilt. (The failure to mention Cambyses may simply mean the author had no documents available from that period.) For detailed discussion of the difficulties presented by the passage and the various theories advanced to explain them, see H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC), 56-60.

**2 sn** *Ahasuerus*, otherwise known as Xerxes I, ruled ca. 486-464 b.c.

**3 map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

**4 tn** *Heb* "And in the days."

**5 tn** The LXX understands this word as a prepositional phrase ("in peace") rather than as a proper name ("Bishlam"). Taken this way it would suggest that Mithredath was "in agreement with" the contents of Tabeel's letter. Some scholars regard the word in the MT to be a corruption of either "in Jerusalem" (i.e., "in the matter of Jerusalem") or "in the name of Jerusalem." The translation adopted above follows the traditional understanding of the word as a name.

**6 tc** The translation reads the plural with the *Qere* rather than the singular found in the MT *Kethib*.

**7 sn** Artaxerxes I ruled in Persia from ca. 465-425 b.c.

**8 tc** It is preferable to delete the MT's וְהַלְתָּ (ukh<sup>o</sup>tav) here.

**9 sn** The double reference in v. 7 to the Aramaic language is difficult. It would not make sense to say that the letter was written in Aramaic and then translated into Aramaic. Some interpreters understand the verse to mean that the letter was written in the Aramaic *script* and in the Aramaic *language*, but this does not seem to give sufficient attention to the participle "translated" at the end of the verse. The second reference to Aramaic in the verse is more probably a gloss that calls attention to the fact that the following verses retain the Aramaic language of the letter in its original linguistic form. A similar reference to Aramaic occurs in Dan 2:4b, where the

4:8 Rehum the commander<sup>10</sup> and Shimshai the scribe<sup>11</sup> wrote a letter concerning<sup>12</sup> Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows: 4:9 From<sup>13</sup> Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues – the judges, the rulers, the officials, the secretaries, the Erechites, the Babylonians, the people of Susa (that is,<sup>14</sup> the Elamites), 4:10 and the rest of nations whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal<sup>15</sup> deported and settled in the cities<sup>16</sup> of Samaria and other places in Trans-Euphrates.<sup>17</sup> 4:11 (This is a copy of the letter they sent to him:)

"To King Artaxerxes,<sup>18</sup> from your servants in<sup>19</sup> Trans-Euphrates: 4:12 Now<sup>20</sup> let the king be aware that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and odious city.<sup>21</sup> They are

language of that book shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic. Ezra 4:3-6:18 and 7:12-26 are written in Aramaic, whereas the rest of the book is written in Hebrew.

**10 tn** *Aram* "lord of the command." So also in vv. 9, 17.

**11 sn** Like Rehum, Shimshai was apparently a fairly high-ranking official charged with overseeing Persian interests in this part of the empire. His title was "scribe" or "secretary," but in a more elevated political sense than that word sometimes has elsewhere. American governmental titles such as "Secretary of State" perhaps provide an analogy in that the word "secretary" can have a broad range of meaning.

**12 tn** Or perhaps "against."

**13 tn** *Aram* "then." What follows in v. 9 seems to be the preface of the letter, serving to identify the senders of the letter. The word "from" is not in the Aramaic text but has been supplied in the translation for clarity.

**14 tn** For the *qere* of the MT (דְּהַיָּהּ, *dehayeh*, a proper name) it seems better to retain the *Kethib* דְּהַיָּהּ (*dihuh*, "that is"). See F. Rosenthal, *Grammar*, 25, §35; E. Vogt, *Lexicon linguae aramaicae*, 36.

**15 tn** *Aram* "Osnappar" (so ASV, NASB, NRSV), another name for Ashurbanipal.

**sn** *Ashurbanipal* succeeded his father Esarhaddon as king of Assyria in 669 b.c. Around 645 b.c. he sacked the city of Susa, capital of Elam, and apparently some of these people were exiled to Samaria and other places.

**16 tc** The translation reads with the ancient versions the plural בְּקִרְיָהּ (*bəquryah*, "in the cities") rather than the singular ("in the city") of the MT.

**17 tn** *Aram* "beyond the river." In Ezra this term is a technical designation for the region west of the Euphrates river.

**18 tn** The Masoretic accents indicate that the phrase "to Artaxerxes the king" goes with what precedes and that the letter begins with the words "from your servants." But it seems better to understand the letter to begin by identifying the addressee.

**19 tn** *Aram* "men of."

**20 tn** The MT takes this word with the latter part of v. 11, but in English style it fits better with v. 12.

**21 sn** Management of the provinces that were distantly removed from the capital was difficult, and insurrection in such places was a perennial problem. The language used in this report about Jerusalem (i.e., "rebellious," "odious") is intentionally inflammatory. It is calculated to draw immediate attention to the perceived problem.

completing its walls and repairing its foundations. **4:13** Let the king also be aware that if this city is built and its walls are completed, no more tax, custom, or toll will be paid, and the royal treasury<sup>1</sup> will suffer loss. **4:14** In light of the fact that we are loyal to the king,<sup>2</sup> and since it does not seem appropriate to us that the king should sustain damage,<sup>3</sup> we are sending the king this information<sup>4</sup> **4:15** so that he may initiate a search of the records<sup>5</sup> of his predecessors<sup>6</sup> and discover in those records<sup>7</sup> that this city is rebellious<sup>8</sup> and injurious to both kings and provinces, producing internal revolts<sup>9</sup> from long ago.<sup>10</sup> It is for this very reason that this city was destroyed. **4:16** We therefore are informing the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, you will not retain control<sup>11</sup> of this portion of Trans-Euphrates.”

**4:17** The king sent the following response:

“To Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues who live in Samaria and other parts of Trans-Euphrates: Greetings!<sup>12</sup> **4:18** The letter you sent to us has been translated and read in my presence. **4:19** So I gave orders,<sup>13</sup> and it was determined<sup>14</sup> that this city from long ago has been engaging in insurrection against kings. It has continually engaged in<sup>15</sup> rebellion and revolt. **4:20** Powerful kings have been over Jerusalem who ruled throughout the entire Trans-Euphrates<sup>16</sup> and who were the beneficiaries of<sup>17</sup> tribute, custom, and toll. **4:21** Now give orders that these men cease their work and that this city not be rebuilt until such time as I so instruct.<sup>18</sup> **4:22** Exercise appropriate caution so that there is no negligence in this matter. Why should danger increase to the point that kings sustain damage?”

**4:23** Then, as soon as the copy of the letter from King Artaxerxes was read in the presence of Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their colleagues, they proceeded promptly to the Jews in Jerusalem<sup>19</sup> and stopped them with threat of armed force.<sup>20</sup>

**4:24** So the work on the temple of God in Jerusalem came to a halt. It remained halted until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Tattenai Appeals to Darius*

**5:1** Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son<sup>22</sup> of Iddo<sup>23</sup> prophesied concerning the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem<sup>24</sup> in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. **5:2** Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadab began<sup>25</sup> to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem. The prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

**5:3** At that time Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues came to them and asked, “Who gave you authority<sup>26</sup> to rebuild this temple and to complete this structure?”<sup>27</sup> **5:4** They<sup>28</sup> also asked them, “What are the names of the men who are building this edifice?” **5:5** But God was watching over<sup>29</sup> the elders of Judah, and they were not stopped<sup>30</sup> until a report could be dispatched<sup>31</sup> to Darius and a letter could be sent back concerning this.

**5:6** This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and his colleagues who were the officials of

<sup>1</sup> *tn* *Aram* “the treasury of kings.” The plural “kings” is Hebrew, not Aramaic. If the plural is intended in a numerical sense the reference is not just to Artaxerxes but to his successors as well. Some scholars understand this to be the plural of majesty, referring to Artaxerxes. See F. C. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT), 74.

<sup>2</sup> *tn* *Aram* “we eat the salt of the palace.”

<sup>3</sup> *tn* *Aram* “the dishonor of the king is not fitting for us to see.”

<sup>4</sup> *tn* *Aram* “and we have made known.”

<sup>5</sup> *tn* *Aram* “the book of the minutes.”

<sup>6</sup> *tn* *Aram* “of your fathers.”

<sup>7</sup> *tn* *Aram* “discover...and learn.” For stylistic reasons this has been translated as a single concept.

<sup>8</sup> *tn* *Aram* “is a rebellious city.”

<sup>9</sup> *tn* *Aram* “revolts they are making in its midst.”

<sup>10</sup> *tn* *Aram* “from olden days.” So also in v. 19.

<sup>11</sup> *tn* *Aram* “will not be to you.”

<sup>12</sup> *tn* *Aram* “peace.”

<sup>13</sup> *tn* *Aram* “from me was placed a decree.”

<sup>14</sup> *tn* *Aram* “and they searched and found.”

<sup>15</sup> *tn* *Aram* “are being done.”

<sup>16</sup> *sn* The statement that prior Jewish kings ruled over the entire Trans-Euphrates is an overstatement. Not even in the days of David and Solomon did the kingdom of Israel extend its borders to such an extent.

<sup>17</sup> *tn* *Aram* “were being given to them.”

<sup>18</sup> *tn* *Aram* “until a command is issued from me.”

<sup>19</sup> *tn* *Aram* “to Jerusalem against the Jews.”

<sup>20</sup> *tn* *Aram* “by force and power,” a hendiadys.

<sup>21</sup> *sn* Darius I Hystaspes ruled Persia ca. 522–486 b.c.

<sup>22</sup> *tn* *Aram* “son.” According to Zech 1:1 he was actually the grandson of Iddo.

<sup>23</sup> *tn* *Aram* “and Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo the prophet.”

<sup>24</sup> *map* For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>25</sup> *tn* *Aram* “arose and began.” For stylistic reasons this has been translated as a single concept.

<sup>26</sup> *tn* *Aram* “who placed to you a command?” So also v. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *tn* The exact meaning of the Aramaic word ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܣܪܢܐ (*ussarna*) here and in v. 9 is uncertain (BDB 1083 s.v.). The LXX and Vulgate understand it to mean “wall.” Here it is used in collocation with ܒܝܬܐ (*bayta*), “house” as the temple of God), while in 5:3, 9 it is used in parallelism with this term. It might be related to the Assyrian noun *ashurru* (“wall”) or *ashru* (“sanctuary”; so BDB). F. Rosenthal, who translates the word “furnishings,” thinks that it probably enters Aramaic from Persian (*Grammar*, 62-63, §189).

<sup>28</sup> *tc* The translation reads with one medieval Hebrew ms, the LXX, and the Syriac Peshitta ܐܡܪܘ (*amaru*, “they said”) rather than the reading ܐܡܪܢܐ (*amarna*, “we said”) of the MT.

<sup>29</sup> *tn* *Aram* “the eye of their God was on.” The idiom describes the attentive care that one exercises in behalf of the object of his concern.

<sup>30</sup> *tn* *Aram* “they did not stop them.”

<sup>31</sup> *tn* *Aram* “[could] go.” On this form see F. Rosenthal, *Grammar*, 58, §169.

Trans-Euphrates sent to King Darius. 5:7 The report they sent to him was written as follows:<sup>1</sup>

“To King Darius: All greetings!<sup>2</sup> 5:8 Let it be known to the king that we have gone to the province of Judah, to the temple of the great God. It is being built with large stones,<sup>3</sup> and timbers are being placed in the walls. This work is being done with all diligence and is prospering in their hands. 5:9 We inquired of those elders, asking them, ‘Who gave you the authority to rebuild this temple and to complete this structure?’ 5:10 We also inquired of their names in order to inform you, so that we might write the names of the men who were their leaders. 5:11 They responded to us in the following way: ‘We are servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the temple which was previously built many years ago. A great king<sup>4</sup> of Israel built it and completed it. 5:12 But after our ancestors<sup>5</sup> angered the God of heaven, he delivered them into the hands<sup>6</sup> of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this temple and exiled the people to Babylon.’ 5:13 But in the first year of King Cyrus of Babylon,<sup>8</sup> King Cyrus enacted a decree to rebuild this temple of God. 5:14 Even the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and had brought to the palace<sup>9</sup> of Babylon – even those things King Cyrus brought from the palace of Babylon and presented<sup>10</sup> to a man by the name of Sheshbazzar whom he had appointed as governor. 5:15 He said to him, ‘Take these vessels and go deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt in its proper location.’<sup>11</sup> 5:16 Then this Sheshbazzar went and laid the foundations of the temple of God in Jerusalem. From that time to the present moment<sup>12</sup> it has been in the process of being rebuilt, although it is not yet finished.’

5:17 “Now if the king is so inclined,<sup>13</sup> let a search be conducted in the royal archives<sup>14</sup> there in Babylon in order to determine whether King Cyrus did in fact issue orders for this

temple of God to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us a decision concerning this matter.”

#### *Darius Issues a Decree*

6:1 So Darius the king issued orders, and they searched in the archives<sup>15</sup> of the treasury which were deposited there in Babylon. 6:2 A scroll was found in the citadel<sup>16</sup> of Ecbatana which is in the province of Media, and it was inscribed as follows:

“Memorandum: 6:3 In the first year of his reign,<sup>17</sup> King Cyrus gave orders concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> ‘Let the temple be rebuilt as a place where sacrifices are offered. Let its foundations be set in place.’<sup>19</sup> Its height is to be ninety feet and its width ninety<sup>20</sup> feet,<sup>21</sup> 6:4 with three layers of large stones<sup>22</sup> and one<sup>23</sup> layer of timber. The expense is to be subsidized<sup>24</sup> by the royal treasury.<sup>25</sup> 6:5 Furthermore let the gold and silver vessels of the temple of God, which Nebuchadnezzar brought from the temple in Jerusalem and carried to Babylon, be returned and brought to their proper place in the temple in Jerusalem. Let them be deposited in the temple of God.’

6:6 “Now Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar Bozenai, and their colleagues, the officials of Trans-Euphrates – all of you stay far away from there! 6:7 Leave the work on this temple of God alone.<sup>26</sup> Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this temple of God in its proper place.

<sup>15</sup> *tn* Aram “the house of the archives.”

<sup>16</sup> *tc* The translation reads בִּירְתָּא (*birta*, “citadel”) rather than the reading בְּבִירְתָּא (*b<sup>e</sup>vireta*, “in the citadel”) found in the MT. The MT probably experienced dittography here.

<sup>17</sup> *tn* Aram “in the first year of Cyrus the king.”

<sup>18</sup> *map* For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>19</sup> *tn* Aram “raised”; or perhaps “retained” (so NASB; cf. NLT), referring to the original foundations of Solomon’s temple.

<sup>20</sup> *tc* The Syriac Peshitta reads “twenty cubits” here, a measurement probably derived from dimensions given elsewhere for Solomon’s temple. According to 1 Kgs 6:2 the dimensions of the Solomonic temple were as follows: length, 60 cubits; width, 20 cubits; height, 30 cubits. Since one would expect the dimensions cited in Ezra 6:3 to correspond to those of Solomon’s temple, it is odd that no dimension for length is provided. The Syriac has apparently harmonized the width dimension provided here (“twenty cubits”) to that given in 1 Kgs 6:2.

<sup>21</sup> *tn* Aram “Its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits.” The standard cubit in the OT is assumed by most authorities to be about eighteen inches (45 cm) long.

<sup>22</sup> *tn* Aram “stones of rolling.”

<sup>23</sup> *tc* The translation follows the LXX reading הָר (*khad*, “one”) rather than the MT הָרַת (*khadat*, “new”). If the MT reading “new” is understood to mean freshly cut timber that has not yet been seasoned it would seem to be an odd choice for construction material.

<sup>24</sup> *tn* Aram “let be given.”

<sup>25</sup> *tn* Aram “house.”

<sup>26</sup> *tc* For the MT reading “the work on this temple of God” the LXX reads “the servant of the Lord Zurababel” [= Zerubbabel].

<sup>1</sup> *tn* Aram “and it was written in its midst.”

<sup>2</sup> *tn* Aram “all peace.”

<sup>3</sup> *tn* Aram “stones of rolling.” The reference is apparently to stones too large to carry.

<sup>4</sup> *sn* This *great king of Israel* would, of course, be Solomon.

<sup>5</sup> *tn* Aram “fathers.”

<sup>6</sup> *tn* Aram “hand” (singular).

<sup>7</sup> *sn* A reference to the catastrophic events of 586 b.c.

<sup>8</sup> *sn* Cyrus was actually a Persian king, but when he conquered Babylon in 539 b.c. he apparently appropriated to himself the additional title “king of Babylon.” The Syriac Peshitta substitutes “Persia” for “Babylon” here, but this is probably a hyper-correction.

<sup>9</sup> *tn* Or “temple.”

<sup>10</sup> *tn* Aram “they were given.”

<sup>11</sup> *tn* Aram “upon its place.”

<sup>12</sup> *tn* Aram “from then and until now.”

<sup>13</sup> *tn* Aram “if upon the king it is good.”

<sup>14</sup> *tn* Aram “the house of the treasures of the king.”

6:8 “I also hereby issue orders as to what you are to do with those elders of the Jews in order to rebuild this temple of God. From the royal treasury, from the taxes of Trans-Euphrates the complete costs are to be given to these men, so that there may be no interruption of the work.<sup>1</sup> 6:9 Whatever is needed – whether oxen or rams or lambs or burnt offerings for the God of heaven or wheat or salt or wine or oil, as required by<sup>2</sup> the priests who are in Jerusalem – must be given to them daily without any neglect, 6:10 so that they may be offering incense to the God of heaven and may be praying for the good fortune of the king and his family.<sup>3</sup>

6:11 “I hereby give orders that if anyone changes this directive a beam is to be pulled out from his house and he is to be raised up and impaled<sup>4</sup> on it, and his house is to be reduced<sup>5</sup> to a rubbish heap<sup>6</sup> for this indiscretion.<sup>7</sup> 6:12 May God who makes his name to reside there overthrow any king or nation<sup>8</sup> who reaches out<sup>9</sup> to cause such change so as to destroy this temple of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have given orders. Let them be carried out with precision!”

#### *The Temple Is Finally Dedicated*

6:13 Then Tattenai governor of Trans-Euphrates, Shethar-Bozenai, and their colleagues acted accordingly – with precision, just as Darius the king had given instructions.<sup>10</sup> 6:14 The elders of the Jews continued building and prospering, while at the same time<sup>11</sup> Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo continued prophesying. They built and brought it to completion by the command of the God of Israel and by the command of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 6:15 They finished this temple on the third day of the month Adar, which is the sixth<sup>12</sup> year of the reign of King Darius.

6:16 The people<sup>13</sup> of Israel – the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the exiles<sup>14</sup> – observed the dedication of this temple of God with joy. 6:17 For the dedication of this temple of God

they offered one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve male goats for the sin of all Israel, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 6:18 They appointed the priests by their divisions and the Levites by their divisions over the worship of God at Jerusalem,<sup>15</sup> in accord with<sup>16</sup> the book of Moses. 6:19<sup>17</sup> The exiles<sup>18</sup> observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6:20 The priests and the Levites had purified themselves, every last one,<sup>19</sup> and they all were ceremonially pure. They sacrificed the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their colleagues<sup>20</sup> the priests, and for themselves. 6:21 The Israelites who were returning from the exile ate it, along with all those who had joined them<sup>21</sup> in separating themselves from the uncleanness of the nations of the land to seek the LORD God of Israel. 6:22 They observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with joy, for the LORD had given them joy and had changed the opinion<sup>22</sup> of the king of Assyria<sup>23</sup> toward them, so that he assisted<sup>24</sup> them in the work on the temple of God, the God of Israel.

#### *The Arrival of Ezra*

7:1 Now after these things had happened, during the reign of King Artaxerxes<sup>25</sup> of Persia,

<sup>15</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Aram* “according to the writing of.”

<sup>17</sup> **sn** At this point the language of the book reverts from Aramaic (4:8–6:18) back to Hebrew. Aramaic will again be used in Ezra 7:12–26.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the sons of the exile.” So also in v. 20.

<sup>19</sup> **tn** *Heb* “as one.” The expression is best understood as referring to the unity shown by the religious leaders in preparing themselves for the observance of Passover. On the meaning of the Hebrew phrase see *DCH* 1:182 s.v. אֶחָד 3b. See also *HALOT* 30 s.v. אֶחָד 5.

<sup>20</sup> **tn** *Heb* “brothers.”

<sup>21</sup> **tn** *Heb* “who had separated from the uncleanness of the nations of the land to them.”

<sup>22</sup> **tn** *Heb* “heart.”

<sup>23</sup> **sn** The expression “king of Assyria” is anachronistic, since Assyria fell in 612 b.c., long before the events of this chapter. Perhaps the expression is intended subtly to contrast earlier kings of Assyria who were hostile toward Israel with this Persian king who showed them favor.

<sup>24</sup> **tn** *Heb* “to strengthen their hands.”

<sup>25</sup> **sn** If the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:1 is Artaxerxes I Longimanus (ca. 464–423 b.c.), Ezra must have arrived in Jerusalem ca. 458 b.c., since Ezra 7:7–8 connects the time of his arrival to the seventh year of the king. The arrival of Nehemiah is then linked to the twentieth year of the king (Neh 1:1), or ca. 445 b.c. Some scholars, however, have suggested that Ezra 7:7 should be read as “the thirty-seventh year” rather than “the seventh year.” This would have Ezra coming to Jerusalem after, rather than before, the arrival of Nehemiah. Others have taken the seventh year of Ezra 7:7–8 to refer not to Artaxerxes I but to Artaxerxes II, who ruled ca. 404–358 b.c. In this understanding Ezra would have returned to Jerusalem ca. 398 b.c., a good many years after the return of Nehemiah. Neither of these views is certain, however, and it seems better to retain the traditional understanding of the chronological sequence of returns by Ezra and Nehemiah. With this understanding there is a gap of about fifty-eight years between chapter six, which describes the dedication of the temple in 516 b.c., and chapter seven, which opens with Ezra’s coming to Jerusalem in 458 b.c.

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The words “of the work” are not in the Aramaic, but are supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Aram* “according to the word of.”

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Aram* “for the life of the king and his sons.”

<sup>4</sup> **sn** The practice referred to in v. 11 has been understood in various ways: hanging (cf. 1 Esd 6:32 and KJV); flogging (cf. NEB, NLT); impalement (BDB 1091 s.v. הָקָה; *HALOT* 1914 s.v. מִיתָה hitpe; cf. NAB, NIV, NRSV). The latter seems the most likely.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** *Aram* “made.”

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Aram* “a dunghill.”

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Aram* “for this.”

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Aram* “people.”

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Aram* “who sends forth his hand.”

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Aram* “sent.”

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Aram* “in” or “by,” in the sense of accompaniment.

<sup>12</sup> **sn** The sixth year of the reign of Darius would be ca. 516 b.c.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Aram* “sons of.”

<sup>14</sup> **tn** *Aram* “sons of the exile.”

Ezra came up from Babylon.<sup>1</sup> Ezra was the son of Seraiah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Hilkiah, 7:2 who was the son of Shallum, who was the son of Zadok, who was the son of Ahitub, 7:3 who was the son of Amariah, who was the son of Azariah, who was the son of Meraioth, 7:4 who was the son of Zerariah, who was the son of Uzzi, who was the son of Bukki, 7:5 who was the son of Abishua, who was the son of Phinehas, who was the son of Eleazar, who was the son of Aaron the chief priest. 7:6 This Ezra is the one who came up from Babylon. He was a scribe who was skilled in the law of Moses which the LORD God of Israel had given. The king supplied him with everything he requested, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. 7:7 In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, Ezra brought<sup>2</sup> up to Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> some of the Israelites and some of the priests, the Levites, the attendants, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants. 7:8 He entered Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. 7:9 On the first day of the first month he had determined to make<sup>4</sup> the ascent from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he arrived at Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> for the good hand of his God was on him. 7:10 Now Ezra had dedicated himself<sup>6</sup> to the study of the law of the LORD, to its observance, and to teaching<sup>7</sup> its statutes and judgments in Israel.

*Artaxerxes Gives Official Endorsement to Ezra's Mission*

7:11 What follows<sup>8</sup> is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priestly scribe.<sup>9</sup> Ezra was<sup>10</sup> a scribe in matters pertaining to the commandments of the LORD and his statutes over Israel:

7:12<sup>11</sup> “Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, a scribe of the perfect law of the God of heaven: 7:13 I have now issued a decree<sup>12</sup> that anyone in my kingdom from the people of Israel – even the priests and Levites – who wishes to do so may go up with you to Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> 7:14 You are authorized<sup>14</sup> by the king and his seven advisers to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your possession,<sup>15</sup> 7:15 and to bring silver and gold which the king and his advisers have freely contributed to the God of Israel, who resides in Jerusalem, 7:16 along with all the silver and gold that you may collect<sup>16</sup> throughout all the province of Babylon and the contributions of the people and the priests for the temple of their God which is in Jerusalem. 7:17 With this money you should be sure to purchase bulls, rams, and lambs, along with the appropriate<sup>17</sup> meal offerings and libations. You should bring them to the altar of the temple of your God which is in Jerusalem. 7:18 You may do whatever seems appropriate to you and your colleagues<sup>18</sup> with the rest of the silver and the gold, in keeping with the will of your God. 7:19 Deliver to<sup>19</sup> the God of Jerusalem the vessels that are given to you for the service of the temple of your God. 7:20 The rest of the needs for the temple of your God that you may have to supply,<sup>20</sup> you may do so from the royal treasury.

7:21 “I, King Artaxerxes, hereby issue orders to all the treasurers of<sup>21</sup> Trans-Euphrates, that you precisely execute all that Ezra the priestly scribe of the law of the God of heaven may request of you – 7:22 up to 100 talents of silver, 100 cors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of olive oil,<sup>22</sup> and unlimited<sup>23</sup> salt. 7:23 Everything that the God of heaven has required should be precisely done for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should there be wrath<sup>24</sup> against the empire of the king and his

<sup>1</sup> tn The words “came up from Babylon” do not appear in the Hebrew text until v. 6. They have been supplied here for the sake of clarity.

<sup>2</sup> tc The translation reads the Hiphil singular וַיַּעַל (*vayya'al*, “he [Ezra] brought up”) rather than the Qal plural וַיַּעֲלוּ (*vayya'alu*, “they came up”) of the MT.

tn Heb “he brought”; the referent (Ezra) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>3</sup> map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>4</sup> tc The translation reads יָסַד (*yissad*, “he appointed” [= determined]) rather than the reading יָסַד (*y<sup>s</sup>sud*, “foundation”) of the MT. (The words “to make” are supplied in the translation for clarity and for stylistic reasons.)

<sup>5</sup> sn Apparently it took the caravan almost four months to make the five hundred mile journey.

<sup>6</sup> tn Heb “established his heart.”

<sup>7</sup> tn Heb “to do and to teach.” The expression may be a hendiadys, in which case it would have the sense of “effectively teaching.”

<sup>8</sup> tn Heb “this.”

<sup>9</sup> tn Heb “the priest, the scribe.” So also in v. 21.

<sup>10</sup> tn The words “Ezra was” are not in the Hebrew text but have been added in the translation for clarity.

<sup>11</sup> sn Ezra 7:12-26 is written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

<sup>12</sup> tn Heb “from me is placed a decree.” So also in v. 21.

<sup>13</sup> map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>14</sup> tn Aram “sent.”

<sup>15</sup> tn Aram “in your hand.”

<sup>16</sup> tn Aram “find.”

<sup>17</sup> tn Aram “their meal offerings and their libations.”

<sup>18</sup> tn Aram “brothers.”

<sup>19</sup> tn Or “before.”

<sup>20</sup> tn Aram “may fall to you to give.”

<sup>21</sup> tn Aram “who are in.”

<sup>22</sup> tc The translation reads מִשַׁח בַּתֵּין (*m<sup>e</sup>shakh battin*) rather than בַּתֵּין מִשַׁח (*battin m<sup>e</sup>shakh*) of the MT.

<sup>23</sup> tn Aram “he did not write.”

<sup>24</sup> tn The Aramaic word used here for “wrath” (בְּרָחַץ, *q<sup>e</sup>tsaf*; cf. Heb בְּרָחַץ, *qatsaf*) is usually used in the Hebrew Bible for God’s anger as opposed to human anger (but contra Eccl 5:17 [MT 5:16]; Esth 1:18; 2 Kgs 3:27). The fact that this word is used in v. 23 may have theological significance, pointing to the possibility of divine judgment if the responsible parties should fail to make available these provisions for the temple.

sons? 7:24 Furthermore, be aware of the fact<sup>1</sup> that you have no authority to impose tax, tribute, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the musicians, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or the attendants at the temple of this God.

7:25 “Now you, Ezra, in keeping with the wisdom of your God which you possess,<sup>2</sup> appoint judges<sup>3</sup> and court officials who can arbitrate cases on behalf of all the people who are in Trans-Euphrates who know the laws of your God. Those who do not know this law should be taught. 7:26 Everyone who does not observe both the law of your God and the law of the king will be completely<sup>4</sup> liable to the appropriate penalty, whether it is death or banishment or confiscation of property or detention in prison.”

7:27<sup>5</sup> Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who so moved in the heart of the king to so honor the temple of the LORD which is in Jerusalem! 7:28 He has also conferred his favor on me before the king, his advisers, and all the influential leaders of the king. I gained strength as the hand of the LORD my God was on me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

#### *The Leaders Who Returned with Ezra*

8:1 These are the leaders<sup>6</sup> and those enrolled with them by genealogy who were coming up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

8:2 from the descendants of Phinehas, Gershon;

from the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel;

from the descendants of David, Hattush 8:3 the son of Shecaniah;<sup>7</sup>

from the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were enrolled by genealogy 150 men;

8:4 from the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men;

8:5 from the descendants of Zattu,<sup>8</sup> Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men;

8:6 from the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men;

8:7 from the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men;

8:8 from the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men;

8:9 from the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men;

8:10 from the descendants of Bani,<sup>9</sup> Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men;

8:11 from the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men;

8:12 from the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men;

8:13 from the descendants of Adonikam there were the latter ones.<sup>10</sup> Their names were Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men;

8:14 from the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai, and Zaccur,<sup>11</sup> and with them<sup>12</sup> 70 men.

#### *The Exiles Travel to Jerusalem*

8:15 I had them assemble<sup>13</sup> at the canal<sup>14</sup> that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there for three days. I observed that the people and the priests were present, but I found no Levites there. 8:16 So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan,<sup>15</sup> Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were teachers. 8:17 I sent them to Iddo, who was the leader in the place called Casiphia. I told them<sup>16</sup> what to say to Iddo and his relatives,<sup>17</sup> who were the

<sup>9</sup> **tc** The MT lacks “Bani.” It is restored on the basis of certain LXX mss.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Or “those who came later.” The exact meaning of this Hebrew phrase is uncertain. It may refer to the last remaining members of Adonikam’s family who were in Babylon. So, for example, H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC), 108; cf. NASB, NIV, NCV. The phrase has also been taken to mean “the younger sons (so NAB), or the ones who “returned at a later date” (so TEV).

<sup>11</sup> **tc** The translation reads with the Qere, the Lucianic Greek recension, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Vulgate יְזַכּוּר (v<sup>e</sup>zakkur, “and Zaccur”) rather than the *Kethib* of the MT, יְזַבּוּד (v<sup>e</sup>zavud, “and Zabbud”).

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The MT has “with him” (so NAB). The present translation (“with them”) is based on the reading of many medieval Hebrew mss, the Lucianic Greek recension, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Vulgate (so also KJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV).

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Or “I gathered them.”

<sup>14</sup> **tn** *Heb* “river.” So also in vv. 21, 31.

<sup>15</sup> **tc** The name “Elnathan” occurs twice in this list. Some, assuming an accidental repetition, would include it only once (cf. NAB).

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* “I placed in their mouth words.”

<sup>17</sup> **tc** The translation reads with the LXX and Vulgate יְאָחִייוּ (v<sup>e</sup>ekhayv, “and his brethren” = “relatives”; so NCV, NLT) rather than the reading אָחִייוּ (akhivv, “his brother”) of the MT.

<sup>1</sup> **tn** *Aram* “we are making known to you.”

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Aram* “in your hand.”

<sup>3</sup> **tc** For the MT reading שֹׁפְטִים (*shofitim*, “judges”) the LXX uses the noun γραμματεῖς (*grammateis*, “scribes”).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** On the meaning of this word see HALOT 1820-21 s.v. אֲבִדָּה; E. Vogt, *Lexicon linguae aramaicae*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> **sn** At this point the language of the book reverts from Aramaic (7:12-26) back to Hebrew.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the heads of their families.”

<sup>7</sup> **tc** The MT reads here “from the sons of Shecaniah” with no descendant identified in what follows, contrary to the pattern of the context elsewhere. However, it seems better to understand the first phrase of v. 3 with the end of v. 2; the phrase would then modify the name “Hattush.” This understanding requires emending the reading מִבְּנֵי (*mibb<sup>e</sup>ne*, “from the sons of”) in the MT to בֶּן (*ben*, “[the] son of”). Cf. NAB, TEV, CEV, NLT.

<sup>8</sup> **tc** The MT lacks “of Zattu.” The translation adopted above follows the LXX in including the words.

temple servants in<sup>1</sup> Caspitha, so they would bring us attendants for the temple of our God.

**8:18** Due to the fact that the good hand of our God was on us, they brought us a skilled man, from the descendants of Mahli the son of Levi son of Israel. This man was Sherebiah,<sup>2</sup> who was accompanied by his sons and brothers,<sup>3</sup> 18 men, **8:19** and Hashabiah, along with Jeshaiah from the descendants of Merari, with his brothers and their sons, 20 men, **8:20** and some of the temple servants that David and his officials had established for the work of the Levites – 220 of them. They were all designated by name.

**8:21** I called for a fast there by the Ahava Canal, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek from him a safe journey<sup>4</sup> for us, our children, and all our property. **8:22** I was embarrassed to request soldiers and horsemen from the king to protect us from the enemy<sup>5</sup> along the way, because we had said to the king, “The good hand of our God is on everyone who is seeking him, but his great anger<sup>6</sup> is against everyone who forsakes him.” **8:23** So we fasted and prayed to our God about this, and he answered us.

**8:24** Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, together with<sup>7</sup> Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers,<sup>8</sup> **8:25** and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels intended for the temple of our God – items that the king, his advisers, his officials, and all Israel who were present had contributed. **8:26** I weighed out to them<sup>9</sup> 650 talents of silver, silver vessels worth 100 talents,<sup>10</sup> 100 talents of gold, **8:27** 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 darics, and two exquisite vessels of gleaming bronze, as valuable as gold. **8:28** Then I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, just as these vessels are holy. The silver and the gold are a voluntary offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. **8:29** Be careful with them and protect them, until you weigh them out before the leading priests and the Levites and the family leaders of Israel in Jerusalem,<sup>11</sup> in the storerooms

of the temple of the LORD.”

**8:30** Then the priests and the Levites took charge of<sup>12</sup> the silver, the gold, and the vessels that had been weighed out, to transport them to Jerusalem to the temple of our God.

**8:31** On the twelfth day of the first month we began traveling from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from our enemy and from bandits<sup>13</sup> along the way. **8:32** So we came to Jerusalem, and we stayed there for three days. **8:33** On the fourth day we weighed out the silver, the gold, and the vessels in the house of our God into the care<sup>14</sup> of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest, and Eleazar son of Phinehas, who were accompanied by Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui, who were Levites. **8:34** Everything was verified<sup>15</sup> by number and by weight, and the total weight was written down at that time.

**8:35** The exiles who were returning from the captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel – twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs, along with twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. **8:36** Then they presented the decrees of the king to the king’s satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, who gave help to the people and to the temple of God.

### *A Prayer of Ezra*

**9:1** Now when these things had been completed, the leaders approached me and said, “The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the local residents<sup>16</sup> who practice detestable things similar to those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. **9:2** Indeed, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race<sup>17</sup> has become intermingled with the local residents. Worse still, the leaders and the officials have been at the forefront of all of this!”

**9:3** When I heard this report, I tore my tunic and my robe and ripped out some of the hair from my head and beard. Then I sat down,

<sup>1</sup> *tn* *Heb* “in the place called.” This phrase has not been repeated in the translation for stylistic reasons.

<sup>2</sup> *tn* *Heb* “and Sherebiah.” The words “this man was” are not in the Hebrew text, but have been supplied in the translation for clarity and for stylistic reasons.

<sup>3</sup> *tn* Or “relatives” (so CEV; NRSV “kin”); also in v. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *tn* *Heb* “a straight way.”

<sup>5</sup> *tn* A number of modern translations regard this as a collective singular and translate “from enemies” (also in v. 31).

<sup>6</sup> *tn* *Heb* “his strength and his anger.” The expression is a hendiadys (one concept expressed through two terms).

<sup>7</sup> *tc* The translation reads *וְהַשֵּׁבִיָּה וְהַשֵּׁבִיָּיָה* (*sherev<sup>7</sup>yah vakhshavyah*, “and Sherebiah and Hashabiah”) rather than the reading *וְהַשֵּׁבִיָּה לְשֵׁבִיָּיָה* (*sherev<sup>7</sup>yah khashavyah*, “to Sherebiah Hashabiah”) of the MT.

<sup>8</sup> *tn* Or “relatives”; or “colleagues” (cf. NLT “ten other priests”).

<sup>9</sup> *tn* *Heb* “upon their hand.”

<sup>10</sup> *tn* Possibly “100 silver vessels worth [?] talents” or “silver vessels weighing 100 talents.”

<sup>11</sup> *map* For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>12</sup> *tn* *Heb* “received.”

<sup>13</sup> *tn* *Heb* “from the hand of the enemy and the one who lies in wait.” Some modern English versions render the latter phrase as “ambushes” (cf. NASB, NRSV).

<sup>14</sup> *tn* *Heb* “upon the hand of.”

<sup>15</sup> *tn* The words “everything was verified” are not in the Hebrew text but have been supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>16</sup> *tn* *Heb* “the peoples of the lands.” So also in v. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *tn* *Heb* “the holy seed,” referring to the Israelites as God’s holy people.

quite devastated. **9:4** Everyone who held the words of the God of Israel in awe<sup>1</sup> gathered around me because of the unfaithful acts of the people of the exile.<sup>2</sup> Devastated, I continued to sit there until the evening offering.

**9:5** At the time of the evening offering I got up from my self-abasement,<sup>3</sup> with my tunic and robe torn, and then dropped to my knees and spread my hands to the LORD my God. **9:6** I prayed,<sup>4</sup>

“O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God! For our iniquities have climbed higher than our heads, and our guilt extends to the heavens. **9:7** From the days of our fathers until this very day our guilt has been great. Because of our iniquities we, along with our kings and<sup>5</sup> priests, have been delivered over by the local kings<sup>6</sup> to sword, captivity, plunder, and embarrassment – right up to the present time.

**9:8** “But now briefly<sup>7</sup> we have received mercy from the LORD our God, in that he has left us a remnant and has given us a secure position<sup>8</sup> in his holy place. Thus our God has enlightened our eyes<sup>9</sup> and has given us a little relief in our time of servitude. **9:9** Although we are slaves, our God has not abandoned us in our servitude. He has extended kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, in that he has revived us<sup>10</sup> to restore the temple of our God and to raise<sup>11</sup> up its ruins and to give us a protective wall in Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

**9:10** “And now what are we able to say after this, our God? For we have forsaken your commandments **9:11** which you commanded us through your servants the prophets with these words:<sup>13</sup> ‘The land that you are entering to possess is a land defiled by the impurities of the local residents!<sup>14</sup> With their abominations they have filled it from one end to the other with

their filthiness. **9:12** Therefore do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, and do not take their daughters in marriage for your sons. Do not ever seek their peace or welfare, so that you may be strong and may eat the good of the land and may leave it as an inheritance for your children<sup>15</sup> forever.’

**9:13** “Everything that has happened to us has come about because of our wicked actions and our great guilt. Even so, our God, you have exercised restraint<sup>16</sup> toward our iniquities and have given us a remnant such as this. **9:14** Shall we once again break your commandments and intermarry with these abominable peoples? Would you not be so angered by us that you would wipe us out, with no survivor or remnant? **9:15** O LORD God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant this day. Indeed, we stand before you in our guilt. However, because of this guilt<sup>17</sup> no one can really stand before you.”

### *The People Confess Their Sins*

**10:1** While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself to the ground before the temple of God, a very large crowd of Israelites – men, women, and children alike – gathered around him. The people wept loudly.<sup>18</sup> **10:2** Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, from the descendants of Elam,<sup>19</sup> addressed Ezra:

“We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying<sup>20</sup> foreign women from the local peoples.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, there is still hope for Israel in this regard.<sup>22</sup> **10:3** Therefore let us enact<sup>23</sup> a covenant with our God to send away all these women and their offspring, in keeping with your counsel, my lord,<sup>24</sup> and that of those who respect<sup>25</sup> the commandments of our God.

<sup>1</sup> *tn* Heb “who trembled at the words of the God of Israel.”

<sup>2</sup> *tn* Heb “the exile”; the words “the people” are not in the Hebrew text, but are supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>3</sup> *tn* The Hebrew word used here is a *hapax legomenon*. It refers to the self-abasement that accompanies religious sorrow and fasting.

<sup>4</sup> *tn* Heb “I said.”

<sup>5</sup> *tc* The MT lacks “and” here, but see the LXX and Vulgate.

<sup>6</sup> *tn* Heb “the kings of the lands.”

<sup>7</sup> *tn* Heb “according to a little moment.”

<sup>8</sup> *tn* Heb “a peg” or “tent peg.” The imagery behind this word is drawn from the experience of nomads who put down pegs as they pitched their tents and made camp after times of travel.

<sup>9</sup> *tn* Heb “to cause our eyes to shine.” The expression is a figure of speech for “to revive.” See *DCH* 1:160 s.v. אור Hi.7.

<sup>10</sup> *tn* Heb “has granted us reviving.”

<sup>11</sup> *tn* Heb “to cause to stand.”

<sup>12</sup> *map* For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>13</sup> *tn* Heb “through your servants the prophets, saying.”

<sup>14</sup> *tn* Heb “the peoples of the lands.”

<sup>15</sup> *tn* Heb “sons”; cf. KJV, NAB, NIV, NLT “children”; NCV, TEV “descendants.”

<sup>16</sup> *tn* Heb “held back downwards from”; KJV “hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve” (NIV, NRSV, NLT all similar).

<sup>17</sup> *tn* Heb “this”; the referent (the guilt mentioned previously) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>18</sup> *tn* Heb “with much weeping.”

<sup>19</sup> *tc* The translation reads with the *Qere*, many medieval Hebrew MSS, the LXX, the Syriac Peshitta, and Vulgate עילם (*elam*, “Elam”) rather than the reading עילם (*olam*, “eternity”) found in the MT.

<sup>20</sup> *tn* Heb “in that we have given a dwelling to.” So also in vv. 14, 17, 18.

<sup>21</sup> *tn* Heb “the peoples of the lands.”

<sup>22</sup> *tn* Heb “upon this.”

<sup>23</sup> *tn* Heb “cut.”

<sup>24</sup> *tn* The MT vocalizes this word as a plural, which could be understood as a reference to God. But the context seems to suggest that a human lord is intended. The apparatus of *BHS* suggests repointing the word as a singular (“my lord”), but this is unnecessary. The plural (“my lords”) can be understood in an honorific sense even when a human being is in view. Most English versions regard this as a reference to Ezra, so the present translation supplies “your” before “counsel” to make this clear.

<sup>25</sup> *tn* Heb “who tremble at”; NAB, NIV “who fear.”

And let it be done according to the law. **10:4** Get up, for this matter concerns you. We are with you, so be strong and act decisively!”

**10:5** So Ezra got up and made the leading priests and Levites and all Israel take an oath to carry out this plan.<sup>1</sup> And they all took a solemn oath. **10:6** Then Ezra got up from in front of the temple of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he stayed<sup>2</sup> there, he did not eat food or drink water, for he was in mourning over the infidelity of the exiles.

**10:7** A proclamation<sup>3</sup> was circulated<sup>4</sup> throughout Judah and Jerusalem<sup>5</sup> that all the exiles were to be assembled in Jerusalem. **10:8** Everyone who did not come within three days would thereby forfeit all his property, in keeping with the counsel of the officials and the elders. Furthermore, he himself would be excluded from the assembly of the exiles.

**10:9** All the men of Judah and Benjamin were gathered in Jerusalem within the three days. (It was in the ninth month, on the twentieth day of that month.) All the people sat in the square at the temple of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the rains.

**10:10** Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have behaved in an unfaithful manner by taking foreign wives! This has contributed to the guilt of Israel. **10:11** Now give praise to the LORD God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the local residents<sup>6</sup> and from these foreign wives.”

**10:12** All the assembly replied in a loud voice: “We will do just as you have said!<sup>7</sup> **10:13** However, the people are numerous and it is the rainy season.<sup>8</sup> We are unable to stand here outside. Furthermore, this business cannot be resolved in a day or two, for we have sinned greatly in this matter. **10:14** Let our leaders take steps<sup>9</sup> on behalf of all the assembly. Let all those in our towns who have married foreign women come at an appointed time, and with them the elders of each town and its judges, until the hot anger of our God is turned away from us in this matter.”

**10:15** Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah were<sup>10</sup> against this, assisted by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite. **10:16** So the exiles proceeded accordingly.

Ezra the priest separated out<sup>11</sup> by name men who were leaders in their family groups.<sup>12</sup> They sat down to consider this matter on the first day of the tenth month, **10:17** and on the first day of the first month they finished considering all the men who had married foreign wives.

#### *Those Who Had Taken Foreign Wives*

**10:18** It was determined<sup>13</sup> that from the descendants of the priests, the following had taken foreign wives: from the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. **10:19** (They gave their word<sup>14</sup> to send away their wives; their guilt offering was a ram from the flock for their guilt.)

**10:20** From the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

**10:21** From the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziyah.

**10:22** From the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

**10:23** From the Levites: Jozabad, Shimeih, Kelaiah (also known as Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

**10:24** From the singers: Eliashib. From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

**10:25** From the Israelites: from the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

**10:26** From the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

**10:27** From the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

**10:28** From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

**10:29** From the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

**10:30** From the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

**10:31** From<sup>15</sup> the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, **10:32** Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

<sup>1</sup> tn Heb “to do according to this plan.”

<sup>2</sup> tc The translation reads וַיֵּשֶׁב (vayyalen, “and he stayed”) rather than the reading וַיֵּשֶׁב (vayyelekh, “and he went”) of the MT. Cf. the LXX.

<sup>3</sup> tn Heb “voice.”

<sup>4</sup> tn Heb “they sent.”

<sup>5</sup> map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>6</sup> tn Heb “the peoples of the land.”

<sup>7</sup> tn Heb “thus according to your word [singular = Qere] concerning us, to do.”

<sup>8</sup> tn Heb “the time [is] rain showers.”

<sup>9</sup> tn Heb “stand.”

<sup>10</sup> tn Heb “stood.”

<sup>11</sup> tc The translation reads the Hiphil singular וַיִּבְרַד לוֹ (vayyavdel lo, “separated for himself”) rather than the Niphal plural וַיִּבְרְלוּ (vayyibbad<sup>lu</sup>, “were separated”) of the MT.

<sup>12</sup> tn Heb “the heads of the fathers, to the house of their fathers, and all of them by name.”

<sup>13</sup> tn Heb “found.”

<sup>14</sup> tn Heb “hand.”

<sup>15</sup> tc The translation reads with many medieval Hebrew mss and ancient versions וּבְנֵי (umibb<sup>ne</sup>, “and from the sons of”) rather than the reading וּבְנֵי (ubene, “and the sons of”) found in the MT.

**10:33** From the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

**10:34** From the descendants of Bani:<sup>1</sup> Maadai, Amram, Uel, **10:35** Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, **10:36** Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, **10:37** Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

**10:38** From<sup>2</sup> the descendants of Binnui: Shimei, **10:39** Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, **10:40** Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, **10:41** Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, **10:42** Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

**10:43** From the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

**10:44** All these had taken foreign wives, and some of them also had children by these women.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The name “Bani” appears in both v. 29 and v. 34. One of these names has probably undergone alteration in the transmission process, but it is not clear exactly where the problem lies or how it should be corrected.

<sup>2</sup> **tc** The translation reads וּבְנֵי בְנֵי (umibb<sup>e</sup>ney vinnuy, “and from the sons of Binnui”) rather than the reading וּבְנֵי וּבְנֵי (uvani uvinnuy, “and Bani and Binnui”) of the MT.

<sup>3</sup> **tc** The final statement in v. 44 is difficult in terms of both its syntax and its meaning. The present translation attempts to make sense of the MT. But the passage may have undergone corruption in the transmission process. One proposal is that the text should be emended to read “and they sent these wives and children away” (cf. NAB, NRSV, TEV, CEV).